1: Gusinde SH6 Yahgan SH6

622, 754, 755, 776, 787, 789, 791, 793, 874

[Information on various aspects of Yahgan culture which are closely related to the characteristics and activities of the yékamuš or medicine-man, including his training, role as a community leader, curer, sorcerer, and custodian of religious lore, have been marked for category 756 and will be found under that classification.]

/627 cont./

must be fulfilled. We refer, first of all, to the regulations and customs that apply to a marriage contract. The important position of the woman in the economy assures her position within the family equal to that of the man. It is the strict social duty of every individual family, apart from any purely natural compulsion, to rear the children according to the prevailing principles and the established social aims. Beyond that, as a continuation and supplement of family rearing, the tribe or group also offers the young people at the time of maturity a community education in the youth initiation. There are many good reasons why this ceremony /628/ should be discussed in this section, although it is derived from the realm of religious ideas. In nothing else among the Yamana does the primitive state manifest itself so clearly as in the youth initiation, and it functions beyond the narrow legal boundaries of the family, exercising its own rights.

Several families are naturally associated through blood ties, but only loosely, and the reciprocal obligations growing out of this are the kind universally found among human beings. Five dialect groups have been established as associations of larger proportions, but these cannot be regarded as a division based on social principles (p. 199 /untranslated/). Moreover, there is no hierarchy based on birth and station, nor are there class differences which elsewhere rest on accomplishments or property. Finally, unification of the entire tribal community under a single head, such as a chief or magistrate, priest or sorcerer, did not take place among our Indians.

There are ancient tribal customs with the force of legal obligations, as well as definite principles about possessions and property, and the public sees to it that they are faithfully followed. It also observes and practices the cultivation of the universally familiar tribal virtues. Crimes against the assured duration of the family or against related groups are settled in smaller or larger combats. Although there is no special social division and no appointment of an authoritative person to rule the community, there is a distinct and binding power embracing all members of the tribe -- namely, the state, no matter how weak and undefined it still appears in its earliest beginnings.

/901 cont./

511 help might be indispensable to them.

Formerly, when whales often showed up in the channels of the Cape Horn realm, the natives from all regions flocked together more often, camped together on the same spot, and became better acquainted. Intermarriage followed and with it repeated visits of parents when a young married woman followed her new husband into his home district. It is true that existing boundaries were universally respected, especially those of the dialect groups. Moreover, people assumed the right /902/ to roam them undisturbed, but they did not misuse this right by roaming about aimlessly for any length of time in the strange region.

Local conditions themselves explain why the three northern dialect groups can associate more frequently with one another than with the two dialect groups farther south (p. 199 /untranslated/).

2. Its Leadership

623 What can be read between the lines in the above section must finally be clothed in definite words, namely, that our Yamana do not recognize any person as having the authority to rule either the whole society or the larger groups within it, no matter what names are applied to such persons in higher social organizations. This by no means strange phenomenon is confirmed not only by the independent position of the individual family and its freedom to settle anywhere, but also by the definite testimony of many observers. Despard (b):146 avows: "They have no king, chief, or other person, distinguished from his fellows by hereditary or commonly right of rule. They have no council of state" /cited in English/. Hyades (j):184 repeats the same thing: "The Fuegians do not have chiefs, and they are opposed to any idea of superiority and authority" /translated from French/ (234). Thus there is no

234. Only in this sense is Bove's (e):138 assertion valid: "The expression 'authority' is a dead word." Compare Alvarez:145, Bove (g):134, Cooper:177, Fitz-Roy (e):178, Lothrop (b):140, Lovisato (b):136, and others.

/802 cont./

622 single person with legal authority at the head of the whole tribe or the individual groups. Here we do not even have the institution of the kamil of the Selk'nam (Vol. I, 423).

692 627 Similarly there is no authoritative judge over all the people: everyone must seek his own justice. He finds aid and support among his circle of kinsmen in cases of legal disputes. The settlement of a dispute is determined more or less by club law. Everyone is dependent upon himself and his nearest kinsfolk for his defense, for, as Despard (b):716 assures us, "in Fireland is no king or magistrate. All men have equal rights and equal wrongs" /cited in English/. Decisions are, of course, not always just, and the absence of a non-partisan public authority based on legal principles damages character and weakens the sense of justice. Many inequalities with serious consequences develop on this foundation. Stirling has mentioned some of them: "This absence of chieftainship gives the violent spirits a better social position than they deserve, and a more dangerous sphere. It is left to individuals to avenge wrongs, at least for the most part; the strength and composure of a defined public opinion, vindicating right and proceeding to punish the wrong-doer are only exceptionally known. The law of the strongest prevails" /cited in English/ (MM IV, 34; 1870).

It is to their own advantage that this Fuegian population is peacefully inclined. Outbreaks of violence in cases of legal disputes always affect /803/ only small circles and even this is infrequent. Among most of them an honest effort to be righteous and to observe tribal customs largely prevails. Infractions of the general feeling of justice and violations of the freedom of others seldom occur.

557 111 Among the Yamana there is no superior authority appointed by law, either for the entire tribal community or for smaller groups. There are always certain men, however, who, as a result of their advanced age and blameless character, their long experience and mental superiority, have a moral influence of such importance that it amounts to positive control (235). Thus

235. Fitz-Roy (a):178 realized: "There is no superiority of one over another, except that

2: Cooper E-4 (no date) 1946 SH6 Yahgan SH6

586 second wife. Desertion was more frequent on the man's part than on the woman's.

888 The aged were, according to all dependable evidence, usually respected, well treated, and well cared for. Neither abandonment or killing of the aged was ordinarily practiced but may have occurred in exceptional cases.

621 Political life.—Over and above the biological family there was no closely organized larger group or constituted authority. There were no sibs, secret or other societies, or social classes, and no chiefs or ruling group or caste of any kind. Each biological family was for most practical purposes a sovereign political unit. The sense of individual independence was deep. No man took or brooked orders
555 or dictation from any other. However, aggressive individuals of personal force and strength, especially if they had powerful kin backing, at times dominated. Older men of recognized intelligence and integrity exercised considerable moral influence.

612 The next group to the biological family was the kinship group, mostly a paternal one. The members gave mutual aid where called for, particularly in feuds and in blood-revenge activities. The kinship group, owing to common patrilocal residence, was partly, but not fully localized.

619 The five regional divisions of the *Yahgan*, each with its distinctive dialect, had very slight political significance. Members of one division were usually chary of trespassing, at least for long, upon the territory of any other division, unless there were a recognized good cause, such as grave shortage of food, partaking of a stranded whale, trading, gathering canoe bark or fire-making materials.

621 Each of the five dialectic regions was broken up into local groups, each of which appears to have been composed, mostly at least, of members related by blood or marriage (Koppers, 1926 b, p. 5). Each such local group had its own territory—that of Ushuaia, for instance, occupied 20 miles (32 km.) of coast line on Beagle Channel—and its own name derived from its locality. Like the dialectic groups,
[622] these local groups had no chiefs. The local group's chief function
[881] was that of holding the čiéxaus initiation rite. The leader chosen therefor had authority only so long as the rite lasted. As the čiéxaus rite was an educational device contributing greatly to social conformity and solidarity, the local group's political function was chiefly an indirect pedagogical one. Loyalty to fellow members of a local group existed, but was not as strong as that to one's own kinship group.

628 There was no organized process of judicial procedure. In case
[882] of murder, the victim's kin took blood revenge on the murderer or his kin, or settled with him or them by composition. At times such kinship feuds led to a sort of pitched battle, in which slings,

3: Lothrop E-5 (1924-1925) 1928
SH6 Yahgan SH6

FISH-NET

227 At certain seasons of the year Beagle channel is infested by small sardine-like fish which the Yahgan captured in dip-nets (*chiwanúsh*) woven of grass. A rather poorly-made example of these is shown in fig. 89. It will be noted that there is a light wooden frame enclosed by parallel stems of grass tied to the members of the frame. This was lashed to the end of a pole and with it the fish were dipped out. A model of this implement appears in the bow of the canoe in fig. 73.

FIG. 89.—Yahgan dip-net. Height, 12 in. (14/2321)

FISH-WEIRS

According to Hyades (1891, p. 372) the Yahgan sometimes erected in suitable places fish-weirs consisting of a row of stakes. Of these I saw no trace in Tierra del Fuego.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

594 484 Yahgan society was based on the family. There was no higher unit. However, related families usually paddled their canoes in couples, as the skin housetop was heavy for a single canoe, and they divided the common roof into two parts, of which each carried one. While the Yahgan were rovers, they usually stayed regularly in one district, where most of the people were their relatives.

622 554 All observers of the Yahgan comment on their lack of leadership. Medicine-men asserted a certain authority through the fear they inspired, but at times they were roughly handled, so their power was in no wise secure. As no communal enterprises were undertaken, there existed no need for chiefs.